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# Illinois Issues

July/August 2001 \$3.95

*A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield*

## Political waters



### *Change in course?*

**There's a price in draining wetlands  
and restraining rivers**

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the Sox from moving to Florida.

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As a sports fan and policy analyst, I have no opinion on whether Illinois should finance stadiums anywhere, even if the Missouri deal goes bust. What I do know as an observer is that in Illinois politics, like baseball, anything is possible.

It's worth recalling what happened in 1988. On the afternoon of the last day of the session, nobody thought Sox proponents could muster enough votes for a new stadium. But as midnight approached, first the Senate and then the House narrowly approved a complex \$150 million package for a new Comiskey Park. The money would

July 1 — legally three minutes too late. But the legislature's official clock said it was 11:59 p.m., June 30. And so it was. The new stadium opened in 1991.

Now, recall how the most recent Illinois session ended. For a few hours, all capital projects were off the table. But lots of capital funding reappeared. So did an \$800 million McCormick expansion plan. History should teach us never to be surprised by what lawmakers do in the final days, no matter what's said publicly.

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- Will the final compromise be a new O'Hare runway and a new or expanded airport somewhere else?
- Which party will the new legislative districts favor? Just as important: When will we know?
- Are the Republicans trying to copy in 2002 the Democrats' usually inept way of nominating their gubernatorial candidate?

As others plot answers behind the scenes, enjoy the rest of the summer. □

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Ed Wojcicki



## Confidential to Cardinals: a lesson from 13 years ago

by Ed Wojcicki

As the summer heat sets in, my thoughts drift to baseball. They drift back 13 years, to 1988 when the Illinois legislature adopted a last-minute plan to build a new Comiskey Park for the Chicago White Sox. That prevented the Sox from moving to Florida.

So what should we make of Carlyle Democratic Rep. Kurt Granberg's suggestion that Illinois consider financing a new stadium for the St. Louis Cardinals? Preposterous and improbable, you think? Maybe. The Cardinals probably don't want to relocate to Illinois, and it's questionable whether Illinois would consider helping them. But even though the team, St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay and Gov. Bob Holden announced a tentative deal June 19, the Missouri legislature had adjourned.

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come mostly from the statewide hotel tax and from annual contributions from the state and the city of Chicago.

The vote might not have been legal, but nobody seemed to care. Many said the Sox bailout bill passed at 12:03 a.m. July 1 — legally three minutes too late. But the legislature's official clock said it was 11:59 p.m., June 30. And so it was. The new stadium opened in 1991.

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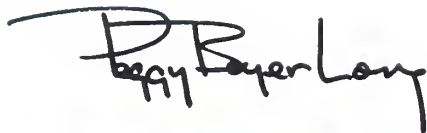
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## Our sixth annual environmental issue celebrates the nature of Illinois

by Peggy Boyer Long

A few weeks back, the mallard made her way to the bay from the hosta bed nearest our house, where she had, improbably, chosen to build her nest. That corner of the garden went unweeded for a month. Then one morning, tiny ducklings crowded close on their mother's tail for their first swim. I counted five. I won't count again. The great horned owls had begun, as they always do, searching out nests of their own in late February, sending five-note night calls through the still woods across the lane. They will be a dark presence through high summer, swift and silent in flight. Though fascinating to glimpse on the wing, their hunts are terrible to see and hear. Unconcerned, the great blue herons have been fishing off the dock for some time. And from our vantage point, we've counted four deer, one raccoon, one coyote, one woodchuck and enough Canada geese of various ages to populate a good portion of the state. The Monarch butterflies and the screech owls are overdue. The mergansers have moved on. It's in this way, as much as by the calendar, that we mark our seasons. All of us, really. Whether we live in country, suburb or city — and whether we pay any mind or no — the birds, the animals, the wild places of Illinois, however changed at our hands, continue to define time and space. If we will pause to see and hear, they can help us to learn who we are, and our place in this world. For these reasons, each year at this time we celebrate the nature of Illinois, and offer some warnings about what could be lost. This is our sixth such issue. Enjoy. And savor the summer. □

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Photograph by Jason Lindsey



*An egret and a white-tailed deer meet at a prairie pothole wetland in Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area near Morris southwest of Joliet*

# Illinois Issues

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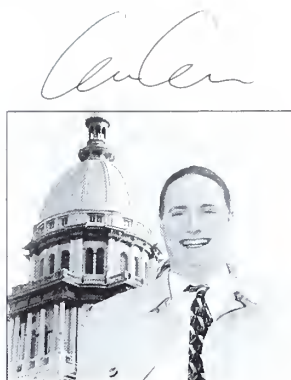
by Charles N. Wheeler III  
*An under-vote for election reform*

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## The pressure's on for Illinois to alleviate congestion at O'Hare

by Aaron Chambers

If the scene had played out in a theater, it could have been called absurd. But it wasn't drama, it was Illinois politics.

Former Gov. Jim Edgar says that, in the early 1990s, when he tried to get Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley behind plans to build an airport in Peotone to the south of the city, he offered the mayor full control over operations. "I said, 'You can have that airport, I just want to build the airport,'" Edgar told the *Daily Southtown* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. "I didn't really care about contracts and all those types of things. My concern was that we needed that airport in the south suburban area."

Imagine Chicago annexing a corridor one mile wide down I-57 to Peotone, then incorporating enough acreage to build an airport. Daley could control the new airport's contracts and jobs. The city could take some tax revenue. And travelers passing through an airport more than 40 miles south of City Hall could eat a Chicago-style hot dog and boast about visiting The Windy City. No doubt, if Edgar's story is true, the mayor gave the prospect some thought.

The let-Chicago-have-Peotone proposal may be an extreme example of the political bartering that has defined the debate over Chicagoland's aviation future, but it nonetheless

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*The curtain may be about to fall on this long-running show. All politics might be local, but Illinois is getting national reviews. And they aren't good.*

seems a suitable metaphor for all that's transpired since.

Progress toward alleviating congestion at O'Hare International, the Midwest's major airport — and one Daley indisputably controls — has been slow. The current governor, George Ryan, who also wants to build an airfield in Peotone, and Daley, who would rather expand O'Hare, are the latest pols to butt heads over the issue.

But the curtain may be about to fall on this long-running show. All politics might be local, but Illinois is getting national reviews. And they aren't good. In fact, a U.S. Senate committee in June put pressure on state and city officials to offer a compromise plan by September 1.

For his part, Ryan says he hasn't ruled out approving new runways, or reconfiguring existing runways to expand capacity for takeoffs and

landings at O'Hare — though this position seems to fly in the face of a campaign pledge. And some say that Daley might be willing to relax opposition to Peotone if he can get some more concrete at O'Hare.

National pressure is growing for some such compromise. In April, Iowa's two U.S. senators threatened to push federal legislation that would kill Ryan's authority to veto new runways. U.S. Rep. Bill Lipinski, a Chicago Democrat and a mayoral ally, has introduced legislation to that effect. The U.S. Senate committee came down on local officials at its summer hearing in Chicago to review the region's aviation problems. And the O'Hare Delay Task Force, convened jointly by the Federal Aviation Administration and the city, held its first meeting in June.

At the same time, more Illinoisans are talking about exploring another way out. "It is no longer an either/or situation," says state Rep. George Scully Jr., a Flossmoor Democrat and vice chairman of the House Aviation Committee. "The demand is there and we're going to have to do both. And if we can't respond to demand, demand will go elsewhere."

Meanwhile, stranded passengers continue to camp out at O'Hare. And when O'Hare is backed up, so is the entire nation's aviation system. In March, Kenneth Mead, the U.S. Transportation Department's inspector general, reported to a U.S. House committee that in 2000 O'Hare had more "chronically delayed" flights — delayed for one hour or more — than any airport in the nation. His report said O'Hare, with 9,900 chronically delayed flights, beat New York's LaGuardia, with 6,135, San Francisco, with 4,911, and Newark, with 2,817.

Overall, the report said, arrival delays at O'Hare increased 26 percent and cancellations increased 21 percent between 1999 and 2000. "The combination of burgeoning demand and limited capacity have resulted in widespread customer dissatisfaction with air travel — which FAA, airlines, and airports all have a role in addressing," it said.



And if that assessment wasn't harsh enough, in April the FAA issued another report. The conclusion: O'Hare meets or exceeds its capacity for some three and a half hours on "good weather" days and is overscheduled for eight hours on "adverse-weather" days. About 2 percent of flights, according to the FAA, are delayed (more than 15 minutes) on good weather days and 12 percent are delayed on bad weather days.

State officials are focused on the problem, as well. "It has been clear for some time that there is an aviation capacity crisis in the Chicago area," Linda Wheeler, director of the state Department of Transportation's planning and programming office, told the U.S. Senate committee in Chicago. "Addressing delays requires addressing capacity — the two issues are interrelated."

The forecast is for even greater demand for flights. The FAA predicts demand at O'Hare will grow by 18 percent over the next 10 years. In 2000, O'Hare handled an estimated 35.5 million enplanements — a technical term of art meaning people getting on, not getting off, airplanes. The FAA predicts that number will grow by 57 percent to 55.7 million in 2015.

That brings us full circle to the conflict at hand. Despite Rep. Scully's belief in the need for a blended solution, some interests closest to this debate are still posturing in public and seem unwilling to move toward middle ground.

A study commissioned for the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, which supports O'Hare expansion, estimates that Chicago's aviation system contributes \$35 billion annually to the region's economy and generates some 500,000 jobs. The chamber argues the region's prominence as a world-class city for business depends on having only one international transportation hub. An additional airport, the group contends, won't help Chicago capture more international traffic.

There's also suspicion downstate about Peotone. A group called Residents United to Retain Agricultural Land told the state House committee

that Ryan's Peotone campaign comes down to "manipulation, misrepresentation and basically a public relations scheme." The group said in a statement that the plan is generally thought to be "a plan for real estate development."

But opponents to O'Hare expansion, particularly residents and elected officials in the city's northwest suburbs that surround O'Hare, counter that noise and pollution from existing air traffic are excessive. They fear expansion would make things worse. The Suburban O'Hare Commission, a coalition of northwest suburban governments, argues the state can build additional runways for less money, and with less adverse environmental impact, at a new regional airport rather than at O'Hare.

And U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., a Chicago Democrat, argues Peotone is just what the state needs to boost economic development in the south suburbs. In perhaps the strangest match in the aviation debate, the son of the civil rights leader has teamed up with U.S. Rep. Henry Hyde, the conservative Wood Dale Republican, to oppose O'Hare expansion and lobby for the proposed new airport.

"The selected alternative cannot be expansion at O'Hare and construction of a new airport," they wrote in a letter to Andrew Card, chief of staff to President George W. Bush. "New runways at O'Hare would doom the economic feasibility of the new airport, guarantee its characterization as a 'white elephant' and ensure the expansion of the monopoly dominance of United [Airlines] and American Airlines of the Chicago market." (United and American together control about 80 percent of O'Hare's passenger flights. They have opposed any move to build a new airport in Peotone, which could open the door to major competition for air travelers.)

There's another option. A group called Shut This Airport Nightmare Down is trying to shift the focus from Peotone to airports in Gary, Rockford and Milwaukee — airports its members argue are "underutilized."

Indeed, those airports might end up playing a bit part. Expanding O'Hare

and/or building Peotone would take several years. In the short term, those three airports could be used to alleviate congestion at O'Hare.

In May, Scully and Rep. Julie Hamos, a Chicago Democrat and chairwoman of the House Aviation Committee, called on the state to take a "regional" approach to air travel in the Chicago area.

They conclude the state should consider short-term ways to relieve air traffic congestion, such as using Gary, Rockford and Milwaukee, as well as long-term solutions such as expanding O'Hare and building Peotone. "While it is impossible to predict the scope of future air travel demand, it is clear that an effective regional network is critical to the economic vitality of the north-eastern Illinois region," they wrote in their report.

Still, flights out of Rockford and Gary — the closest of the three to Chicago — are limited. And Milwaukee, like Rockford, is well out of the way for travelers to and from the city.

The city has thus far not issued a specific plan for O'Hare's future, but has pledged to do so by July 1. (State officials, at the U.S. Senate hearing, said they hope to respond to the city by the September 1 date.) As for how much new runways or reconfiguration would cost, a city Department of Aviation spokesman says there's no consensus yet on what the numbers are. The state Department of Transportation, meanwhile, says it's in the process of buying land for Peotone. Over the last three years, the legislature has appropriated \$45 million for land acquisition and planning. The department estimates that getting the airport off the ground, with one runway and a highway interchange, will cost \$600 million. Building five or six runways, it says, will cost \$5 billion. A department spokesman says officials are still developing their long-range financial plan.

So momentum toward a solution seems to be coming to a head. In the end, observers say, Illinois probably will get some expansion at O'Hare and, at the least, a groundbreaking at Peotone. In other words, they expect Ryan, Daley and the other powers that be to make a deal. □

# BRIEFLY

Edited by Rodd Whelpley

Photograph courtesy of Operation Migration



Last fall, 13 sandhill cranes followed an ultralight from Wisconsin across Illinois to Florida, more than twice the distance any birds have followed a human leader in flight.

## Return of the cranes

### **Whooper project might fail to take flight**

**A** program to save whooping cranes may be grounded due to lack of funding, despite the success of a pioneering test run that had sandhill cranes following an aircraft across Illinois skies last fall.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expects to get the go-ahead to repeat the procedure with whooping cranes, in an effort to establish a second migratory colony for the whoopers on the East Coast. But the project may not take off, literally, because the group that hatches, trains and flies these cranes to their new wintering home in Florida is short on funds.

The whooper chicks have hatched and are beginning their training in Wisconsin, but a spokeswoman for Operation Migration, a co-founder of the Whooping Crane Eastern

Partnership and the nongovernment Canadian group, says almost \$300,000 is needed to complete the training and take the cranes south next fall. "We get no government funding for our part of the project," says Heather Ray.

Establishing a new migration pattern for the whooping crane could ensure its survival. There is just one migrating flock of less than 200, which winters in a national refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast and is vulnerable to such catastrophic events as hurricanes.

The plan is to take a group of whooping cranes south each year for

10 years to build a strong migratory route through the eastern states.

That plan is modeled after last year's sandhill crane migration. Those hand-reared sandhills that followed an ultralight from Wisconsin to Florida last fall, stopping three times in Illinois (see *Illinois Issues*, November 2000, page 9), have returned on their own to their fledgling grounds. They left their wintering grounds at St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve in central Florida on February 25 and arrived at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin on April 27.

The migratory success of the sandhill crane, an abundant species, culminates 12 years of experiments aimed at saving the sandhill's endangered cousin, the whooping crane. The sandhill migration was a test to see whether cranes would follow an ultralight as far as Florida and would remain wild, both necessary to establish a new migration pattern.

Beverly Scobell



## Kids' project aims to save endangered barn owls

As a vegetarian, Patti Massaglia respects the animal kingdom. As a teacher, she's tried to instill that in her students at Rogers Elementary School in Marquette Heights.

For the past six years, Massaglia has led schoolwide fundraising campaigns to help endangered species. This year, a slight, raspy-voiced bird with a heart-shaped face caught the attention of the budding ecologists. Under Massaglia's tutelage, more than 70 fourth- and fifth-graders at the Tazewell County school sold \$1,600 worth of T-shirts this spring. They gave the money to the Illinois Conservation Foundation to set up nesting boxes for the rural barn owl, a bird whose numbers declined sharply as Illinois' pastures made way for row crops.

According to the state Department of Natural Resources, Illinois may have as few as five nesting pairs of barn owls, which tend to incubate their young for a month between March and June.

"I think it's important for them to learn that everything has been put on this earth for a reason and that they need to respect all living things — that if one species disappears it affects all others," says Massaglia.

Over the past six years, her charges have collected more than \$6,500 to help such species as otters, mud turtles, the eastern massasauga rattlesnake and hibernating bats.

*Maureen Foertsch McKinney*

*Photograph by Chris Young, courtesy of the Illinois Raptor Center*



*Barn owl hatchlings*

*Photograph by Chris Young, courtesy of the Illinois Raptor Center*



*A full-grown barn owl*

## RIVER RISING

### Video project to give Illinoisans a picture of aquatic ecology

Jim Beasley doesn't stress out about Mississippi River flooding. The commercial fisherman, who operates Beasley's Fish Market in Grafton, just goes with the flow. "Usually, when the water comes up, fishing gets good," he says. "Fish get real active and start getting on the move. It's just part of fishing. When the water comes up, you try to follow the fish with the water."

Landowners along the Mississippi also know about the river's tendency to flood. This spring, as in many others, they packed sandbags and reinforced barriers in an effort to keep the surging river at bay. Fish or no fish, they want the Mississippi to stay out of their living rooms.

Patrice Ceisel aims to capture on video these often conflicting views of the Midwest's largest river system. She's producing a documentary on

Mississippi River life and says everybody, including the fish and animals, deal with seasonal flooding. In fact, wildlife in and around the river manage to take advantage of this ever-changing habitat. "You have these animals that breed in shallow water," she says. "Their breeding cycle is short, so that they can exploit this phenomenon — this seasonal, predictable flood that is of a significant duration. They can build their nests, spawn and have their young hatch out. Then there's the animals that get back into the flood waters and do a lot of their developmental growth in these slower waterways back there. There's a lot of aquatic adaptation."

Ceisel began producing the 30-minute video, funded jointly by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and Chicago's Shedd Aquarium, in April. She says it will

focus on relationships between people and riparian ecosystems. More specifically, she wants to examine how people along the Mississippi and Amazon rivers interact with their natural environments — and how land-use changes, such as levee building, have contributed to pollution and floods. She also wants to highlight evolving management practices that, she says, allow the Mississippi and its watershed to function as a system that can support and benefit plants, animals and people. Leaving a buffer zone of vegetation between the river and crop land, for instance, minimizes the dirt and fertilizer that are flushed into the river during flooding.

The documentary is designed to educate viewers about the best ways to manage the watershed. Supporters believe it will help promote regional conservation for aquatic ecosystems

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This fisherman looks for a catch in the Illinois River.

that will sustain native plant and animal species. And they hope to show, in the words of the contract between the state and the Shedd, that ecological health depends on the

"ability to understand and appreciate the complex interdependencies that keep environmental systems healthy."

The project will cost \$170,718. The state's tab is \$102,535, and the Shedd

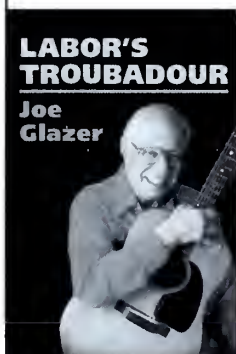
will kick in the rest.

The video is scheduled to be completed by the end of next year.

Aaron Chambers

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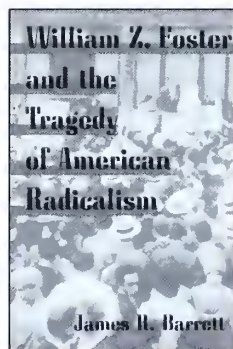
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— Ralph Scharnau, *Journal of Illinois History*

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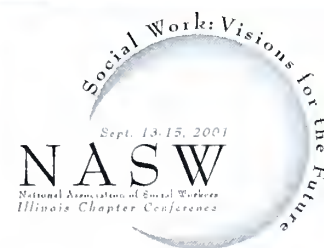
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## BRIEFLY

### An ecological status report

The state Department of Natural Resources' most recent report on the health of Illinois' ecological systems presents a grim picture of the state's environmental health over the past five years. But at least it will have a place in history for the way the data was gathered.

According to *Critical Trends in Illinois Ecosystems*, most Illinois streams have fair or poor habitat quality, and a century of abuse has taken its toll on the environmentally sensitive aquatic insects in the northern three-quarters of the state. Three out of five stream samples indicate a lack of diversity.

In the forests, invasive species dominate the shrub layer, with more than 70 percent counted as non-native. Invasive ground cover plants, such as garlic mustard and ground ivy, blanket more than two and a half

times the area of such disturbance-sensitive indicator species as Dutchman's breeches and white trillium. Northern Illinois forests are most degraded by invasive plants, while southern Illinois forests are least affected by introduced species.

Grasslands suffer the most from introduced species, with 60 of 71 monitoring sites dominated by such invasive species as Kentucky and Canadian blue grasses and meadow fescue. A high quality prairie would support six to 12 grassland-dependent bird species. The research found an average of fewer than two bird species nesting at the sites.

Few wetlands, too, remain in high quality condition, and many are severely degraded due to non-native species invasion, siltation, changes in hydrology, runoff of roadway de-icing salts, drainage activities and grazing. Again, birds are an indicator of environmental quality. A healthy wetland should host six to 10 wetland

species. Researchers found the average number was just over one bird species per site.

Despite these lackluster findings, the report is notable because it relies so heavily on data collected by amateurs.

"For the first time anywhere citizen-collected data has been given equal weight to that collected by the state's biologists," says Dana Curtiss, coordinator of the EcoWatch Network, which trains Illinoisans to help assess the quality of life in its rivers, streams, forests, wetlands and prairies (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2000, page 18).

Using data collected by hundreds of trained volunteers, state scientists are able to conduct more detailed biological inventories. Their report also contains information on 30 areas identified as biologically rich and summaries of assessments taken in 16 regional watershed areas. It can be found on the Web at [dur.state.il.us/oreplctap2](http://dur.state.il.us/oreplctap2).

Beverley Scobell

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## Governor's action

The state rang in a new fiscal year. Shortly after the close of the spring legislative session, Gov. George Ryan signed a \$53.4 billion spending plan for the 2002 budget year that began July 1.

- Education will get \$460 million of the state's expected new revenue. Elementary and secondary school spending will total \$6.2 billion. That boosts per pupil spending by \$135 to \$4,560.
- The budget aims to close a \$270 million shortfall in state health care spending for the poor by boosting claims for federal Medicaid reimbursements and delaying payments to health care vendors by 30 days. Nursing homes got a \$70 million increase in reimbursements.
- Those who work with developmentally disabled people will get a \$1-an-hour raise.
- The state's building program includes more than \$1.1 billion in bond-funded projects, including at least \$300 million lawmakers can use for their projects. The state's school construction program also gets \$740 million. And a \$250 million community college building program will be spread over five years.

## ECO STIX

### We were wondering

These days, it seems, there are associations for everything. And all of them want to issue reports — sometimes with data that seem, well, less than vital. The Multi-housing Laundry Association, for instance, recently commissioned a study that found people who live in apartments with in-unit washing machines use 11,804 gallons a year to clean their clothes. But apartment dwellers who use a common-area laundry facility use only 3,588 gallons. Researchers monitored laundry water use over three months for 1,503 apartments in Phoenix, Ariz. They found residents with washers in their apartments did more loads and used the machines “less efficiently.”

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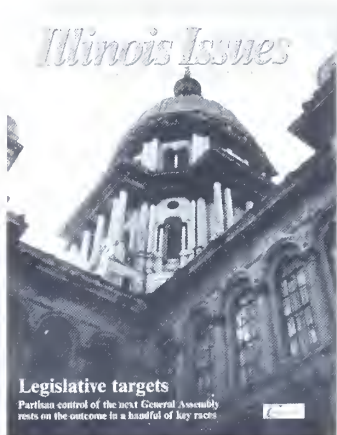
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## BRIEFLY

### WEBSOURCE

#### State of the state's water

Before outdoors enthusiasts jump in a lake for a swim, float down a river in a canoe, or eat fish caught in a stream, they might want to visit the state's water quality Web site at [www.epa.state.il.us/water/water-quality](http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/water-quality) to see just how clean the water is.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's Bureau of Water has created 33 fact sheets, one for each major watershed in Illinois. From the home page, select "Reports and Assessments" or "Maps and Graphs" for the year 2000 and go to the latest information about the state of the state's water. Choose any watershed and get a map with color guides that shows at a glance the water conditions for that area.

For a statewide overview, click on "Condition of Illinois Rivers & Streams." Each page on the site links to more detailed reports on rivers and streams, as well as lakes and drinking water.

*Beverley Scobell*

### Updates

#### Lakes, shots, indians

- Great Lakes water can't be exported unless all Great Lakes governors approve, says a new water use agreement (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 1999, page 22, and July/August 1998, page 22).
- Illinois children won't need chicken pox vaccinations before they attend school this fall, but may have to get them in the future (see *Illinois Issues* January, page 10, and September 2000, page 24).
- The Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, which is claiming rights to 2.6 million acres in Illinois, dropped its lawsuit (see *Illinois Issues*, May, page 14; April, pages 6 and 20; January, page 10; September 2000, page 9).



# Recent Publications

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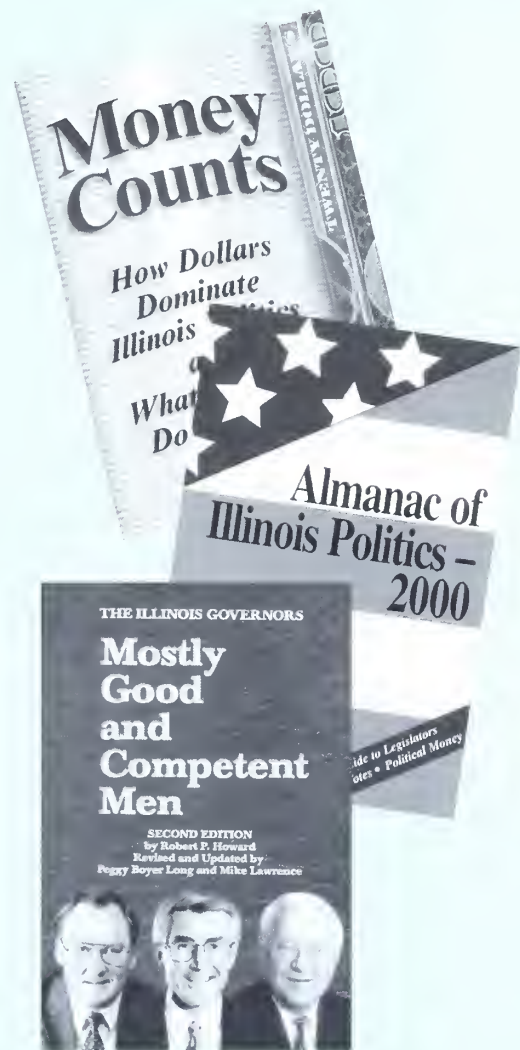
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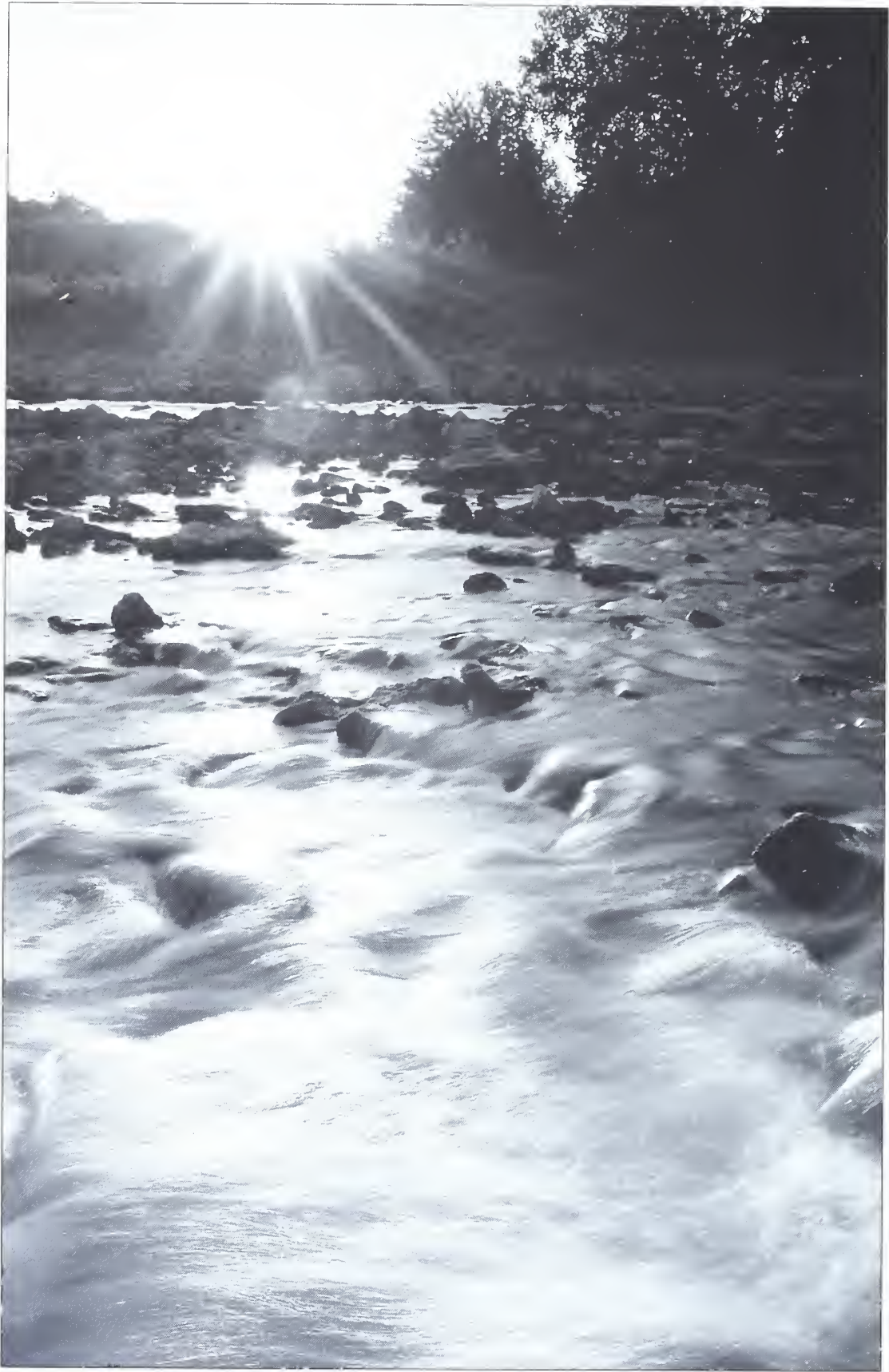
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*Setting sun over the mouth of Rock Creek at Kaukaee River State Park*



# Bend in the river

*The political shift in the nation's capital promises to change the course of environmental policies, perhaps none so decisively as the debate over this country's waterways. As a result, the Mississippi River faces yet another turn in its storied history*

---

Analysis by Bill Lambrecht  
Photographs by Jason Lindsey

Vermont is a long way from the Mississippi River. But with the right boat and some time, it's possible to get there, traveling a long and circuitous route up the Illinois River, through the Chicago Ship and Sanitary Canal, into the Great Lakes and ultimately down Lake Champlain to Burlington.

Illinoisans had reasons to think of Vermont this spring. That tiny state became the epicenter of a national political upheaval when Vermont's Sen. James Jeffords renounced the Republican Party in May, thereby switching the U.S. Senate to Democratic control.

The power shift promises to change the course of public policy in many ways, perhaps none so decisively as the deliberations in Congress on the environment and the nation's rivers. The Mississippi River, in particular, has arrived at a bend in its storied history. Suddenly, as a result of Jeffords' declaration one morning in Burlington, proposals for conservation and restoration programs along that river and others are certain to get a far more serious airing than had been predicted.

Such projects likely will receive more generous allocations than had been planned. Farmers along the Mississippi denied entry to the wetlands reserve program because the initiative had reached its spending ceiling might have a new opportunity next year to take sensitive lands out of production, and in so doing improve water quality and wildlife habitat.

By all accounts, Jeffords' party-shifting will trigger a sea-change in the treatment of environmental issues over the next two years, following President George W. Bush's first two months in office when he downgraded their importance. It could have special meaning for the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Army's \$4 billion civil works agency, and its handling of those Mississippi River issues pending. The political bombshell exploded just as the corps was trying to complete its most expensive and controversial study in history: an analysis of the future of the Mississippi River.

Scott Faber, a lawyer in Washington with the advocacy group Environmental Defense, might not have been exaggerating when he summed up

how the fulminations on Capitol Hill will be felt 800 miles away. "The changes in the Senate are going to have a dramatic effect on the Mississippi River."

It may be hard to match the dramas in past years involving the Mississippi River and the Army Corps of Engineers — especially the tribulations of its river study that continue to unfold.

*The Mississippi River* has grown remote from the lives of most Illinoisans. Rather than being celebrated as the nation's most legendary waterway, often the Mississippi is viewed as little more than a superhighway for barges, most noticed when it jumps its banks in spring to torment those who insist on conquering its floodplain. Instead of being recalled for its role in the settling of the Midwest, the river is viewed as a drainpipe aswirl with the supernutrients of farm runoff en route to the Gulf of Mexico, where they have created a "Dead Zone" of oxygen-depleted waters the size of New Jersey.

Modern farming methods calling



*Kayak and barge on the Illinois River*

for 150 pounds of nitrogen fertilizer per acre of corn are responsible for the nutrient pollution. The Army Corps of Engineers — acting at the behest of Congress — is responsible for turning the Mississippi into something that Louis Jolliet, the merchant, and Jacques Marquette, the priest, could scarcely recognize if they reprised their historic river explorations of 1673.

Aside from the last glacier 12,000 years ago, no other force is more responsible for the appearance of the Mississippi today than the corps. To create a navigable waterway, the corps deepened the river, sped its flow and even changed its course. It would no longer be, as Mark Twain once called it, “the crookedest river in the world” and a wandering body of water with “the disposition to make prodigious jumps by cutting through narrow necks of land.”

The corps would see to it that the willful river did not jump from its course again. The changes began just after the Civil War, when Congress authorized a four-foot channel in the upper Mississippi from St. Louis to St. Paul. This was a time when the nation, motivated by naturalist and adventurer John Wesley Powell of Illinois, was trying to conquer nature by boldly changing rivers. The modern transformation ended in 1940, when construction was completed on

the last dam on the upper stretch of the river, at Clarksville, Missouri.

As far as we know, Army engineers never encountered what the Indians warned Jolliet and Marquette about as they shoved off on their journey: a demon “whose roar could be heard at a great distance, and who would engulf them in the abyss where he dwelt.” Nevertheless, they built a lock and dam system to keep the beast leashed. That restraint moderates its legendary ebb and flow, allowing for consistent navigation. And in altering the river’s form and function, the corps has helped Midwesterners prosper by enabling dependable barge traffic to carry corn and soybeans to foreign markets.

The corps gets credit in some quarters for reducing flooding with the levees it has built and for helping victims when levees won’t hold surging waters. But increasingly the corps is vilified for destroying the backwaters, wetlands and habitats of fish and fowl.

Other than Congress, no entity is more responsible than the corps for disconnecting Illinoisans from the Mississippi River along their state’s western border.

Often there’s been a power struggle between the corps and those who live on the river’s edge and in its basin. In the 1870s, the corps threatened to tear down the Eads Bridge connecting

Illinois with St. Louis after construction had begun in order to show people who really controlled the river, as John Barry recalled in his book, *Rising Tide*. In the 1930s dam-building era, the corps found itself in a battle with Illinois conservationists aided by earlier incarnations of the national Sierra Club and the Izaak Walton League. There were many fights to follow, but in its nearly 200-year history, the corps had never seen as much heat as it has endured during its study about the future of the Mississippi River.

In 1993, the corps began what it ponderously named the Upper Mississippi and Illinois River Waterway System Navigation Study. Not since 1850, when Congress ordered a survey of the Mississippi from Cairo to New Orleans, had army engineers attempted a project of such broad scope. The aim of the new study was to determine the navigation needs of the Mississippi River into the middle of the 21st century and to recommend changes accordingly. That could mean new locks or at least doubling the size of the 600-foot locks on the upper Mississippi and the Illinois.

If the corps determines that new river construction is needed, it would trigger one of the biggest resource battles in the Midwest in recent times, a high-decibel ruckus pitting the farm industry against environmental advocates. Corn and soybean groups are among the farm organizations insisting that modernizing the Mississippi’s lock system is necessary if farmers are to keep up with the South Americans, who have emerged as fierce competitors to Illinoisans in the global trade of commodity grains. Brazil has enjoyed soybean-growing triumphs in its vast, previously empty Cerrado region in the central part of the country by treating the soil with lime. And now South American nations are working on a massive river construction project of their own that frightens Midwestern farmers — a 2,100-mile-long waterway replete with deep-water ports that connect Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Argentina and Uruguay.



When he looks upriver at the Mississippi, that prospect troubles Chris Brescia, president of the Midwest Area River Coalition 2000, a barge and ag industry trade association in St. Louis. "We have the oldest locks with the least modernization and the biggest backlog of maintenance," he says.

But conservationists and others who put a premium on the natural beauty of the river's ecology fear the effects of expanded barge traffic. More barges mean more wakes that uproot the marsh plants that provide sustenance for migratory waterfowl and bolster the food chain when they are left to decay. The wakes from the passing barges also accelerate the decline of shallow water nurseries for fish by filling in side channels and sloughs with sediment. In the minds of the conservationists, those Mississippi River barges are delivering sedimentation along with cargo.

So far, the Army Corps of Engineers has spent \$60 million on its study about what to do along the river. But what has happened during the study so far has changed the corps rather than the river. And the power shift in Washington involving Vermont's James Jeffords might well continue that trend.

**To justify \$1 billion** or more in dam construction to Congress, the corps needs proof the volume of grain that would be moving on the Mississippi in 2050 merits such spending. Though half of that money would come from a barge industry trust fund, the alliance of budget hawks and environmental watchdogs on Capitol Hill must be persuaded that Congress would not be abetting destructive and wasteful construction. To handle the economic portions of its study, the corps named Donald Sweeney, a 22-year veteran in its St. Louis District.

The corps has seen skeptics within its ranks before; in the 1930s, Maj. Charles Hall, commander of the Rock Island District, argued to his superiors that new dams were a risky investment for taxpayers. But nothing



*Barge loading grain on the Illinois River*

in corps history prepared it for the explosive revelations that surfaced during the Sweeney-led study.

Several years into that study, the corps' brass was disturbed and down-right angered by Sweeney's findings, much as they rejected Charles Hall's conclusions 60 years before. Sweeney didn't back down. Finally, in 1998, he was relieved of his supervisory duties in the study, not long after a corps official accused him of being "out to shut down the corps."

Over the years, the corps had been accused by its detractors of rigging analyses to make the case for the water projects that the corps desires for its own growth and that its allies in Congress want for their districts.

What Sweeney disclosed last year — and what would largely be upheld during investigations afterward — lent credence to what the corps' critics had been saying.

In an affidavit he filed with the Office of Special Counsel in Washington, D.C., Sweeney, who had played football at Knox College in Galesburg, delivered a bruising hit to the corps. Armed with a sheath of internal documents and e-mails, he alleged that the corps had "intentionally and deliberately altered" data to support the case for doubling the size of five locks on the Mississippi River and two on the Illinois. He accused the corps of low-balling construction

costs, of ignoring economists' suggestions about ways to reduce barge congestion and of prolonging the study while searching for the answers it wanted.

Corps officials vigorously disputed the charges and before long, Sweeney, who had been entrusted with challenging assignments during his long career, found himself copying down addresses in East St. Louis in connection with a flood control project. But 10 months later, a report from the army's inspector general raised its own troubling specter of what had transpired during the study.

The Pentagon investigation concluded in a blistering report that top corps officers had indeed altered crucial data to justify the lock expansion. The report found what it called "a widespread perception of bias" within the corps in favor of large-scale water projects. What's more, the report said, the corps' zeal to please Congress worked to "create an atmosphere where objectivity in its analyses was placed in jeopardy."

The investigations weren't finished. Earlier this year, the National Academy of Sciences also found flaws in the study and recommended that Mississippi River construction be delayed. Rather than expensive construction, the panel of scientists concluded that "shippers and towboat operators could enjoy immediate

improvements through better traffic management." By then, the Mississippi River study had been halted. And the proposed construction sought by farm groups, the barge industry and their allies in Congress looked dead. But was it?

By this spring, it looked as though Congress and the corps itself had a short memory, a bout of forgetfulness due in part to the changes of administration in Washington. In the waning months of President Bill Clinton's administration, after the damning revelations, the Army tried to rein in the corps by firmly reinstating civilian control and banning lobbying by corps officials. But those reforms were blunted by objections from powerful committee chairmen in the Republican-controlled Senate. This year, with Clinton's combative appointees out the door, it looked as though the corps might escape the white-hot heat of 2000 all but unsinged.

In congressional hearings, there was little of the criticism that had sounded in the aftermath of the Mississippi River study fiasco. The demeanor of corps officials, including Lt. Gen. Robert B. Flowers, the corp's commanding general, changed from contrite to defiant. "What galls me the most is the conclusion we have a bias toward large construction. How you can draw that conclusion from one study is beyond me," Flowers declared while testifying to a House Appropriations subcommittee. The panel's chairman, Rep. Sonny Callahan, an Alabama Republican, echoed a widely held sentiment in Congress when he said: "These are not pork projects. These are projects to help people and make this a better country."

There were even rumors that supporters of lock extension on the Mississippi might begin the appropriations process for the \$1 billion it would take without having the corps' epic study completed.

But in the aftermath of Jeffords' "one-man coup," as one of his detractors put it, the political scenery once again looks different in Washington — as different as the scenery that Rep. Ron Kind, a

Wisconsin Democrat who has a keen interest in Mississippi River issues, woke up to on Easter morning.

What Kind remembers from the morning of April 15 at his Mississippi River home on French Island, near La Crosse, was unusual indeed. "When Tawni and I woke up, the Mississippi was to the east of us rather than the west," Kind says. The floodwaters had overtaken the first floor of Kind's home, prompting an unanticipated canoe voyage to safety by Kind, his wife Tawni, and their two sons, Johnny, 4, and Matthew, 2. The family left the cat behind, safe and happy, Kind emphasizes, with the run of the second floor.

Back in Washington, Kind shortly would be assuaged at the prospect of his Mississippi River legislation faring better as a result of the shifting fortunes of his Democratic Party.

*One of his measures* sounds like something he and his neighbors could use. His proposed Flood Loss Reduction Bill would increase the availability of payments that encourage people to move to higher ground and therefore avoid flood losses. Another of Kind's measures aims at getting a handle on the nutrient pollution in the Mississippi with studies providing the scientific proof needed to win "green payments" from Congress to farmers willing to change their methods. Then there's Kind's proposed Corps of Engineers Reform Act, a controversial piece of legislation that grew from the disclosures surrounding the Mississippi River study. Kind's measure requires review of corps water projects like the Mississippi River lock extension by outside experts and brings the public more fully into the planning. It ranks environmental concerns with economic considerations during decision-making rather than regarding conservation as an afterthought. A few months ago, such legislation was not assured even of a committee hearing. But with the power shift in Washington and an identical bill introduced in the Senate by another Wisconsin Democrat, Sen. Russ

Feingold, some measure of corps reform seems quite possible in the months ahead.

Kind describes the difficulties his legislation had faced. The corps, he says, "is often viewed by members of Congress as their own personal infrastructure agency for projects back home. So you get a lot of members who are reluctant to criticize the corps."

Rather than sweeping charges under the rug, the new Senate majority leader, Tom Daschle, a South Dakota Democrat, had sponsored legislation to investigate the corps. What he had seen, Daschle said previously, "raises serious questions about the accountability and integrity of the corps."

Meanwhile, the corps was wondering if it bit off more than it could chew in trying to look so far into the Mississippi River's future. Hoping to get the study back on track this summer, the corps was entertaining recommendations that it might be wiser to predict 10 or 15 years rather than a half-century into the future.

As for Mississippi River construction, the Democratic takeover makes it more difficult and perhaps impossible for supporters in Congress to orchestrate spending authorization until the corps finishes some sort of study. Says Faber of Environmental Defense: "It eliminates any chance that lock extension will be approved in this session of Congress."

Sen. James Jeffords, a conservationist in the mold of Theodore Roosevelt and the man who stood in Vermont and set in motion all the changes, may have even more to say about the future of the Mississippi River than he already has. After his history-making party switch, he was rewarded by Democrats with an offer to chair the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. □

*Bill Laubrecht covers resource issues in Washington, D.C., for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. His book about the politics of biotechnology, Dinner at the New Gene Cafe, will be published in September by St. Martin's Press. His articles for Illinois Issues on that topic appeared in November 1998 and September 1999.*





# Wild Illinois

*Rivers and swamps  
are critical ecosystems  
in a state best known for prairies*



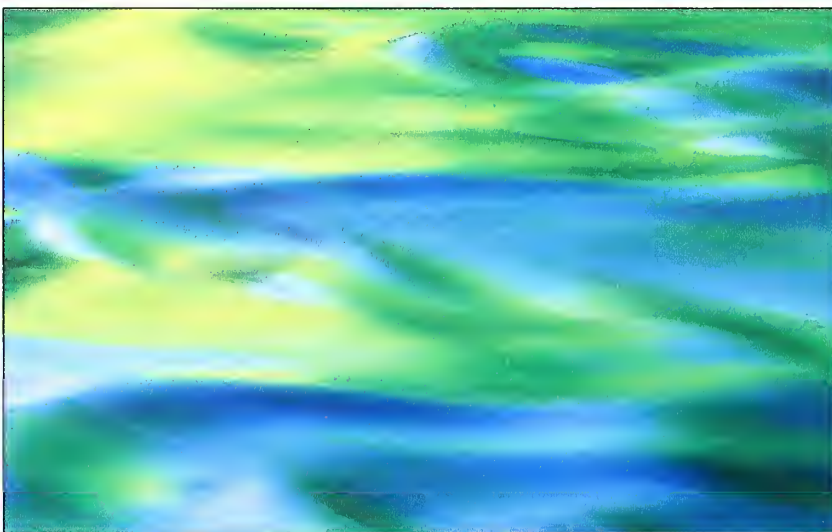
We joined nature photographer Jason Lindsey on an expedition. Sort of.

As it happens, Jason's interest in river ecosystems intersected with ours. He's been working on a book on the subject, and rivers is the theme of this year's environmental issue. So last spring we convinced him to crisscross Illinois for us, too. Bring back some great shots of rivers and wetlands, we said.

Jason has traversed Chicago's waterways, kayaked and hiked along streams in the state's central regions and backpacked through the swamps of Illinois' southern reaches. And, for us, he brought back some great shots.

We knew he would. After all, Jason, who lives in Champaign, wins awards for

*continued*



his environmental images. His photographs have been featured in *Science* and *Illinois Steward* magazines. His clients include the Smithsonian Institution, the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. And already he has one art book to his credit.

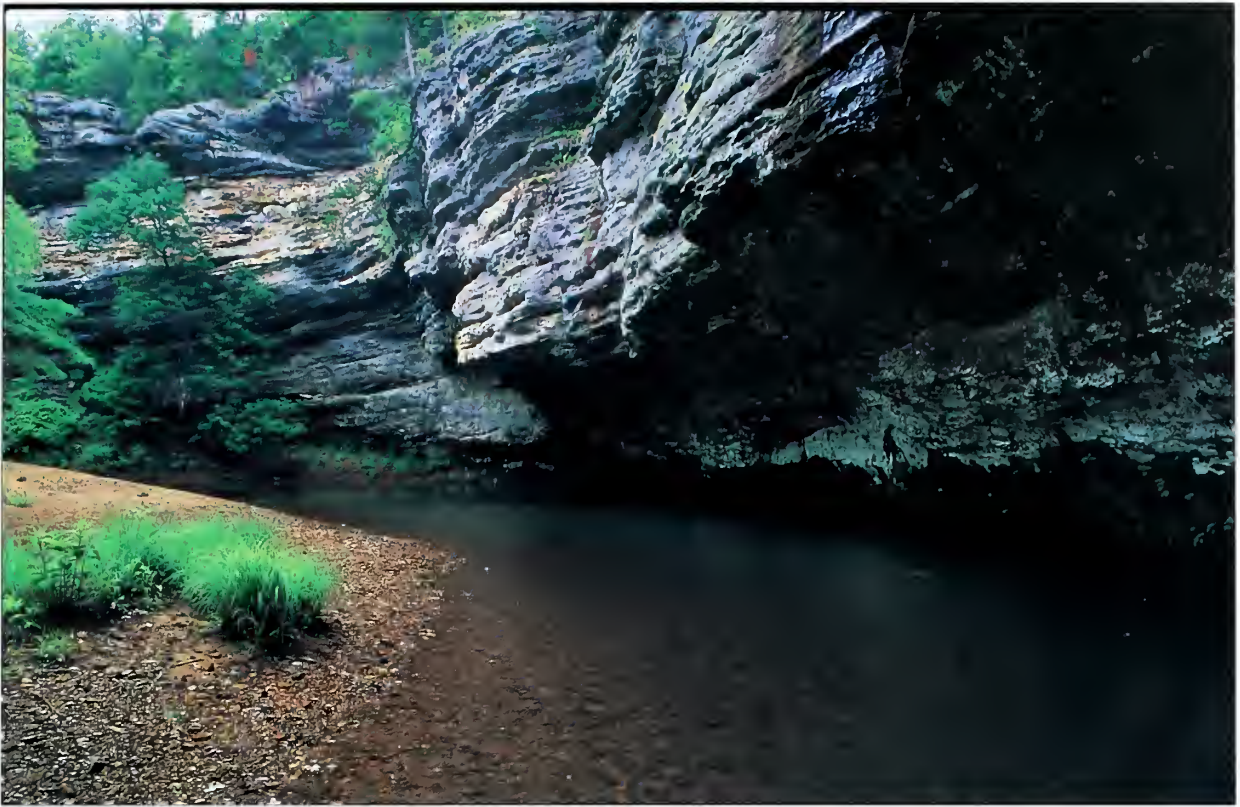
He and photographer Robert Shaw documented restoration efforts in the five distinct ecosystems of the Chicago metropolitan area. Their images appear in *Windy City Wild: Chicago's Natural Wonders*, published late last year by Chicago Review Press, with a foreword by Bill Kurtis.

But Jason says while photographing *Windy City Wild* he noticed that many of the best remaining natural areas in Illinois are associated with rivers. "I just love to be on rivers, and when I'm kayaking in Illinois I feel as if I'm in the middle of a wilderness. It isn't easy to get that feeling in Illinois."

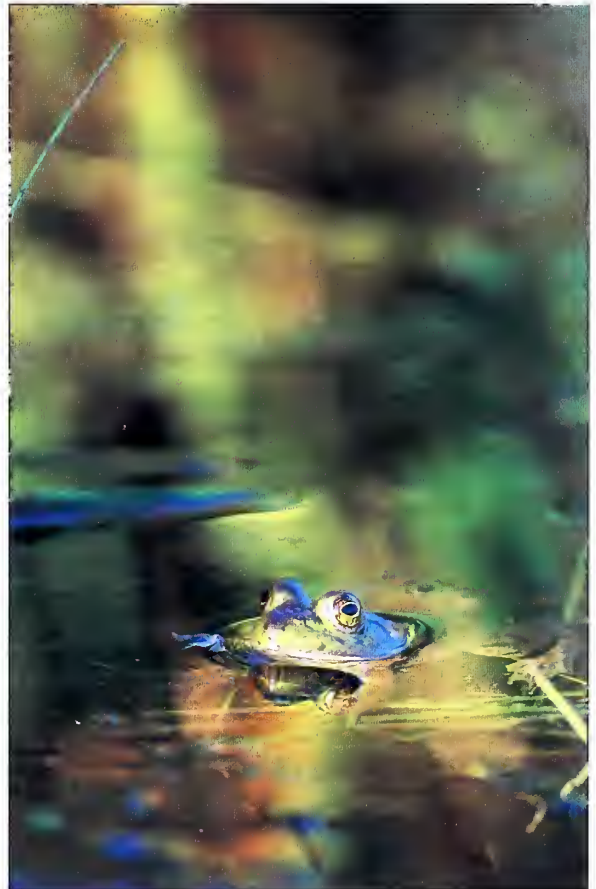
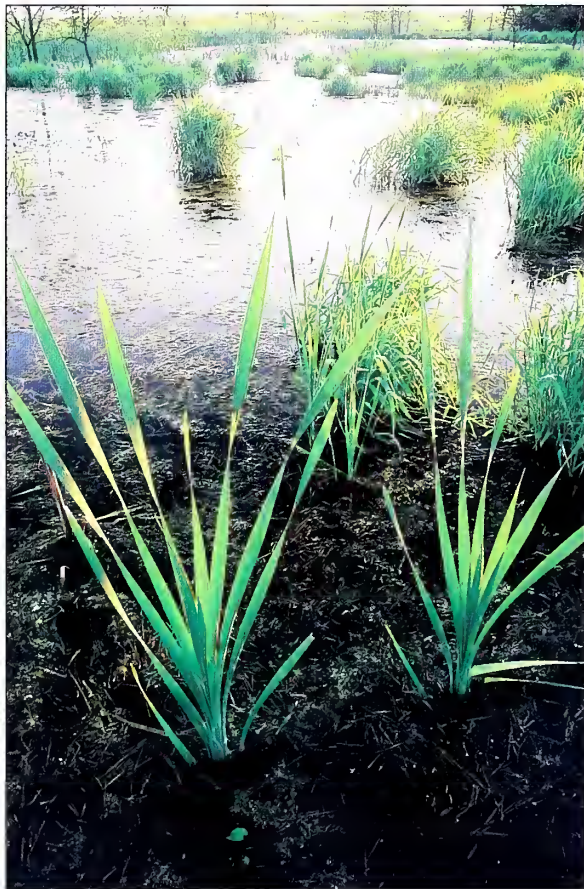
He considers his newest book a passion project — fine art photography books are expensive to produce — and expects to spend another year or so on it. "I really want this book to be amazing. I want people to be astonished that the rivers of Illinois are so beautiful and so diverse biologically."

*The Editors*











# Reclaiming prairie bayous

*Efforts to drain Illinois started early and never stopped. While legal protections for wetlands are still weak, political support for these critical habitats appears to be gaining ground. Is it too little, too late?*

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by Dan Ferber  
Photographs by Jason Lindsey

On a spring morning in Johnson County, a chorus sings of the southern Illinois that once was.

As the rising sun sends shafts of light into the deep green of Heron Pond, songbirds twitter, barred owls hoot and pileated woodpeckers provide the percussion. Great blue herons squawk and stretch their wings on branches of bald cypress, looking for all the world like pterodactyls.

A few miles down the Cache River, though, the bird calls fade. Here, sprawling cypress and tupelo swamps decades ago gave way to farm fields, many of which now lie fallow and grassy, dotted with standing pools and the occasional duck. On one such field, Mark Guetersloh directs a team of local volunteers: "Plant a tree, take four big long steps and plant another one." Working in pairs, the eight volunteers scatter across the field with spades and handfuls of seedlings. By the end of the morning, they'll



Water lilies on Lake Defiance at Moraine Hills State Park

have planted 1,000 trees, including four species of oak that originally grew here. On other Saturdays, volunteers will wade knee deep into water to plant cypress in the mud.

If all goes well, in a few decades the area, which some call the Illinois bayou, will begin to resemble the swampy forest it had been for centuries.

Guetersloh is an ecologist with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, which is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private groups to restore the Cache River wetlands — a stretch of southernmost Illinois that is home to cypress older than the Magna Carta, huge oaks and dozens of species of plants, birds, frogs and fish, some found nowhere else in the state.

These wetlands are so important in sustaining migrating waterfowl that in 1996 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization designated

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*Wetlands provide critical habitat for birds, including the great blue heron, the great egret and the black-crowned night heron, and for salamanders, frogs, snakes and fish.*

the area of global importance, placing it on par with the Everglades and the Okfenokee Swamp.

While the Cache River swamps are special, they illustrate the plight of wetlands throughout Illinois. Although they once covered 9.4 million acres, or 23 percent of the state, more than 90 percent of them had been destroyed by the early 1980s, most drained for agriculture, according to a 1995 state natural resources report.

And this year, the U.S. Supreme Court and the Illinois General Assembly offered no help. Restoration projects like the one along the Cache River appear to be gaining political support, but legal protections for wetlands remain weak. As a result, they continue to lose ground in the Prairie State.

**When the first** European settlers arrived in Illinois, bottomland forest stretched for miles along the floodplains of the state's major rivers, including the Illinois, the Mississippi and the Wabash, where sycamores and tulip trees grew to seven or eight feet wide and as tall as a 10-story building. Much of east central Illinois was a vast, wet, treeless prairie that stretched for miles across the flat land. Northeastern Illinois was a soggy region filled with grassy marshes, fens and scattered peat bogs. The Grand Kankakee Marsh, which stretched from Kankakee County into Indiana,

was two-thirds the size of the Everglades and harbored trumpeter swans, sandhill cranes, timber wolves and bear. In the Cache, ancient bald cypress trees covered the swamps, and enormous pin oaks and sweet gums grew on the nearby floodplain.

Despite this richness of flora and fauna, early settlers regarded the marshes and swamps as useless wastelands that bred disease and made travel difficult and farming impossible. In the Cache area, one settler wrote that the land was "a great place for men and dogs, but powerful hard on women and oxen."

Efforts to drain Illinois started early and never stopped. Beginning in 1848, a series of federal laws called the Swamp Land Acts allowed the land to be sold cheaply, and early farmers set out to lay thousands of miles of drainage tile under their fields. In 1879, the state established the first of more than 1,000 drainage districts, obscure governmental bodies that use local taxes to dig and maintain ditches. By 1900, almost all of the prairie in east central Illinois was gone, and the black soil supported some of the best farmland in the world. By the early 1980s, when the only comprehensive assessment of the state's wetlands was done, less than a million acres remained, and there were only 6,000 acres of high quality undisturbed wetlands left.

**There is a price** for such loss. Wetlands provide critical habitat for birds, including the great blue heron, the great egret and the black-crowned night heron, and for salamanders, frogs, snakes and fish. Of the 94 species of vertebrates that are threatened and endangered in Illinois, 60 rely strongly on wetlands, including such creatures as the swamp rabbit, the mink and the river otter.

People pay, too. A wetland, nature's sponge, soaks up water and releases it slowly during dry times, which lessens flood peaks and increases flow during dry summers. This is not a straightforward equation, it's true. Hydrologist Donald Hey of Wetlands Research Inc. in Chicago calculates that increasing

wetlands in the Mississippi basin by 3 percent, or 13 million acres, would have provided storage for all the water in the 1993 flood. But hydrologist Mike Demissie of the Illinois State Water Survey in Champaign disagrees. He says that while restoring wetlands would go a long way toward easing 5- and 10-year floods, it wouldn't prevent 100-year floods, which happened even before wetlands were destroyed.

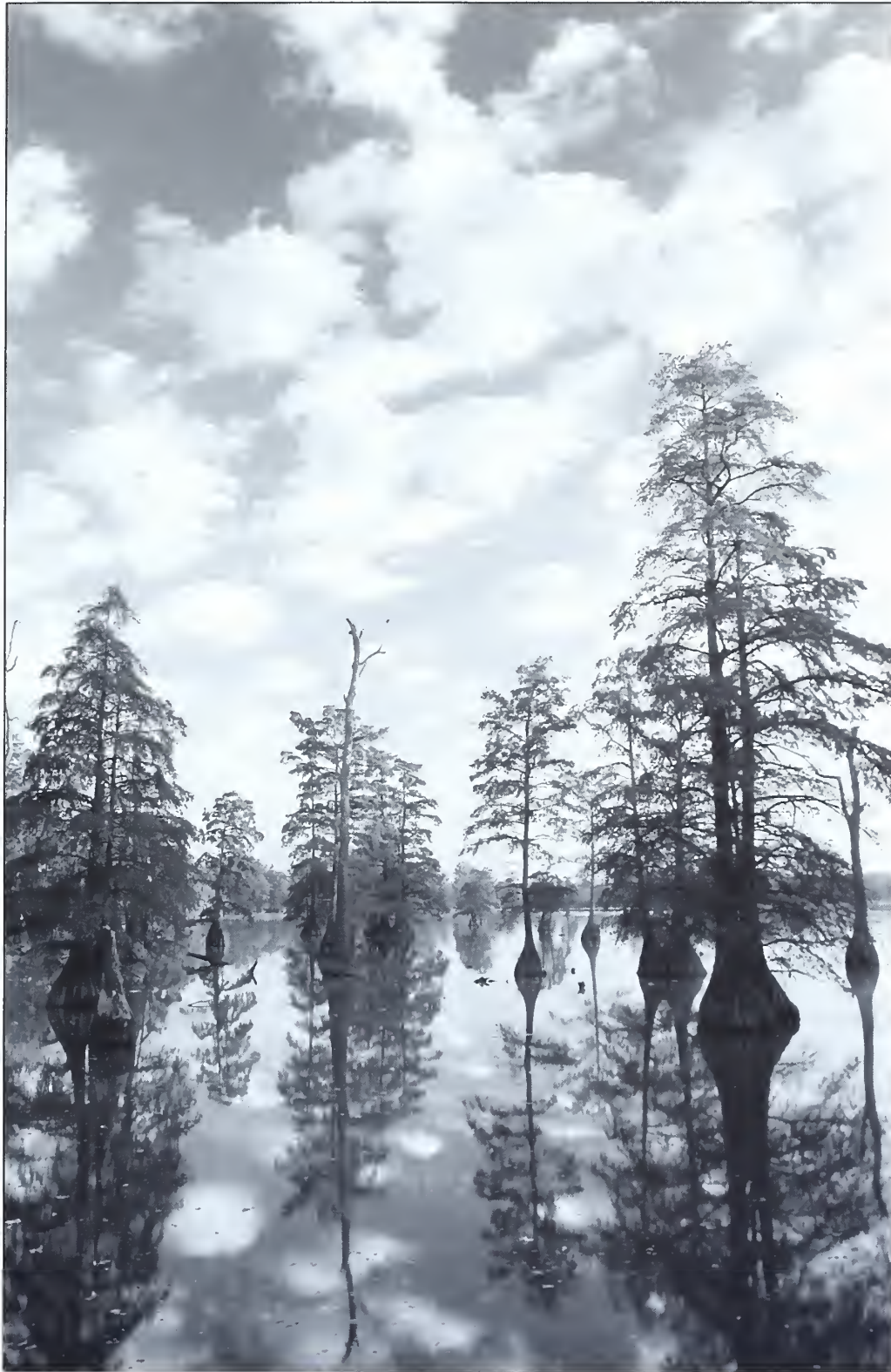
It's less disputable that healthy wetlands cut pollution caused by nutrients and sediments. Since 1985, Hey and his colleagues have kept careful tabs on 550 acres of experimental wetlands they restored on previously farmed ground in the Des Plaines River watershed north of Chicago. By 1991, they determined that those restored wetlands remove an average of 84 percent of the nitrate-nitrogen, 85 percent of the total phosphorus and 92 percent of the suspended solids from the water that flows through them. They also calculated that restoring 400,000 acres of wetlands in flood-prone areas of the Illinois River watershed — just 10 percent of the original wetlands — could slash silting of backwater lakes and cut pollution from nitrate-nitrogen and phosphorus to levels not seen in 150 years. "If we go back and restore some of the wetlands, we will save future generations billions of dollars," Hey says.

And that's what he's aiming to do. The Wetlands Initiative, affiliated with his research organization, recently bought the entire Hennepin Levee and Drainage District — five miles long and one and a half miles wide — north of Peoria on the Illinois River. In April, they allowed rain and groundwater to accumulate to restore two natural backwater lakes, Lake Hennepin and Lake Hopper, which were drained in the early 1900s. Within weeks, shorebirds and ducks, including the green-wing teal, the blue-wing teal and the Bonaparte's gull, had returned to the area.

Other such restoration projects are under way across the state. The Nature Conservancy, a nonprofit environmental group, is restoring two

*continued*





*Cloud formations at sunrise in the cypress-tupelo swamp at Horseshoe Lake Conservation Area*

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*Some quality wetlands remain, certainly, but many are jeopardized by siltation from nearby land development, pollution and invasive plant species, says Allen Plocher, who runs a wetland research group at the Natural History Survey.*

big tracts along the Illinois River: a 1,100-acre site called Spunky Bottoms in Brown County and a 7,000-acre site near Havana, which they purchased last year. When the larger site is restored, it will contain three of the original backwater lakes that were the site of hunting and fishing clubs in the early 1900s, but were drained in the 1920s to create farmland, says Doug Blodgett, who runs the conservancy's program.

Meanwhile, the Illinois natural resources department is teaming up with the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Natural Land Institute, a regional conservation group, and the Grand Victoria riverboat casino to restore 688 acres of wetlands in the Rock River floodplain near Rockford, says Marvin Hubbell, who manages the state agency's ecosystems division.

To the north, the Lake County Forest Preserve District, which encompasses more wetlands per capita than just about any other area of Illinois, enlists more than 1,000 volunteers each year to help restore thousands of acres of floodplain forest, wet prairies, and fens and bogs that harbor plants and animals found nowhere else in the state, says restoration ecologist Ken Klick.

Along the Cache River, federal and state officials aim to preserve and restore a total of 60,000 acres of the that wetland ecosystem.

Despite these efforts, wetlands

continue to be threatened. According to a report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the country lost an average of 58,500 acres of wetlands each year between 1986 and 1997 — a rate of loss 80 percent lower than two decades earlier, but a loss nonetheless. In Illinois, the only accurate tally of wetland acreage was completed by the federal government in the early 1980s, says Liane Suloway of the Illinois Natural History Survey. "We desperately need an update, and that's not coming because there are no funds for it," says Suloway, who is testing new ways to use satellite images to get that data cheaply.

Some quality wetlands remain, certainly, but many are jeopardized by siltation from nearby land development, pollution and invasive plant species, says Allen Plocher, who runs a wetlands research group at the Natural History Survey.

What's missing in most of Illinois are effective rules to prevent wetland destruction by private landowners. And a U.S. Supreme Court decision on an Illinois case removed even more protection, contends Jack Darin, executive director of the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club. Developers and other landowners who want to drain or fill a natural wetland must get a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. But the high court ruled in January that the corps can't prevent the Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County from building a landfill in an isolated wetland in Elgin, a finding that leaves hundreds of isolated marshes, prairie potholes, fens and bogs in northern Illinois and elsewhere without federal protection. "The prospects in the short term are bad," Darin says. "We've got to act quickly to turn it around."

Wisconsin approved a law to close the loophole opened by the court's ruling, and other states are debating the issue. But an effort to close the loophole went nowhere in the Illinois legislature this spring. It was opposed by developers and by representatives of the Illinois Farm Bureau, who argue it would restrict private property rights. Another unsuccessful

measure, supported by developers but opposed by environmentalists, would have barred local governments, particularly in and near Chicago, from enforcing their own stricter regulations. Instead, it would have transferred responsibility to the state Environmental Protection Agency. Mark Harrison, executive vice president of the Homebuilders Association of Illinois, argues the proposal was needed to make wetlands rules uniform across the state. Although developers do recognize the need to protect quality wetlands, he says, "if I have a piece of land and I want to develop it, I should be able to."

In fact, voluntary efforts by landowners do help protect thousands of acres of Illinois wetlands, though a major federal program that encourages farmers to protect wetlands is threatened, too. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Wetlands Reserve Program, has bought long-term or permanent easements on 46,689 acres of wetlands in Illinois from farmers and other landowners in exchange for restoring and protecting wetlands. An additional 18,025 acres have been approved but are still awaiting funds. While the program is popular with farmers and environmentalists, President George W. Bush's proposed budget eliminated all new funding. Congress could move to restore it.

*There are some* hopeful signs. Along the Cache, where the federal program was used to acquire and restore 6,600 acres of wetlands, the volunteers are finishing their planting. Guetersloh surveys the scene, pleased with the morning's efforts. Although work days to restore this ecosystem occur each month, he says, some volunteers come just once. "The ones who stick it out understand the end product better," he says. And such awareness is spreading. As high-quality wetlands disappear, says state naturalist Hubbell, "you realize what the value of the resource really is." □

*Dan Ferber, a correspondent for Science magazine, lives in Urbana.*





*Cypress trees at sunrise, Horseshoe Lake Conservation Area*

# THE SCIENCE OF WATER

*The message in John Wesley Powell's rational approach to nature can be difficult to swallow*

A RIVER RUNNING WEST

Donald Worster, 2001

W.W. Norton and Company

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Review essay by Robert Kuhn McGregor

Photographs by Jason Lindsey

Who has heard of John Wesley Powell?

It seems a shame to ask such a question in the great state of Illinois, where Powell grew to maturity and developed the values and ideas that shaped an incredible career. Unfortunately, the question will prove a poser to the vast majority of the state's residents, who know nothing of this pioneer scientist, heroic war veteran, steely eyed explorer, consummate Washington bureau chief and visionary environmentalist.

Illinois has much to learn from this foster child of the prairies. Yet we have forgotten him.

True, John Wesley Powell was not born in Illinois. He arrived here in his late teens, freed himself from the onerous demands of his parents and taught himself the skills that proved critical to his adult career. His service in an Illinois military unit was valorous, but in no way unusual.

The subsequent exploits that made him famous took place elsewhere, mostly in Washington, D.C.

His story pretty much parallels that of another frontier immigrant, one Illinois has claimed for its own (read the license plates). But there are no monuments to Powell anywhere in Illinois — no official historic sites, no streets or buildings dedicated to his memory. State Historian Thomas Schwartz says the village of Hennepin, where Powell taught school, honored him with a brief celebration in 1994, but that's about it.

John Wesley Powell is Illinois' forgotten son. Far be it from me to suggest that the reasons behind the neglect were his rejection of traditional religion, his embrace of Darwin's lessons and his determined efforts to make people understand that nature's bounty is not limitless. Powell's trajectory was very different from that of the prairie

president, and some important messages can be difficult to swallow.

Powell was born in upstate New York in 1834, the fourth child of evangelical Wesleyans freshly emigrated from England. His family moved frequently, following the American frontier westward, exploiting the opportunities to acquire wealth while spreading the Good Word. They passed through Illinois in 1846 and later returned and settled in Wheaton.

Wes Powell's education was sporadic at best; he spent too much of his youth laboring on farms while his parents preached. Somehow he managed to scrape enough knowledge from private reading to establish himself as a schoolteacher. Growing knowledge inspired confidence and independence. Soon Powell was deeply involved in the state's fledgling system of higher education, both as a student and as a professor.





*Sunrise in winter over the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, a National Scenic river in Kickapoo State Park*

Struggling against his parents' desires, he sought a career as a natural scientist when science was scarcely recognized as a respectable profession. He taught at Illinois Wesleyan in Bloomington, and Illinois Normal (now Illinois State University in Normal) hired him as one of their first science professors, as did the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Attracted by the wild world, the questions posed by the tallgrass prairie, John Wesley Powell rapidly developed a purely rational approach to nature study, very unorthodox for his time. To teach geology, he actually dared to lead students out of the classroom and into the river gorges, where they might view firsthand the evidences supporting the theories of Charles Lyell and Georges Cuvier. He collected widely, carrying innumerable fossils, specimens and pressings back to Normal, where he

served as the first curator of the Illinois Natural History Society Museum, forerunner of today's museum in Springfield. Field study would remain an important component of his approach throughout his career.

Powell was making a minor name for himself when the Civil War broke out. To make an oft-experienced story short, he became an officer, proved himself heroic, got wounded at Shiloh, lost an arm and nearly died. He also made firm contacts in important places, positioning himself to become a political wheel after the war.

The twist in this story is that Powell wasn't really interested in political power for its own sake, but rather was looking to further his scientific interests. He pulled enough strings to convince the Illinois Natural History Society to finance an expedition to explore the Colorado,

the last unmapped river drainage in the American West. To spend money out of state, Powell had to accept a bunch of political appointees, mostly wounded war veterans, as members of his crew.

Powell was a little bandy rooster of a guy, with a big black beard and a stump of an arm, which pained him severely for the rest of his life. He was a more than suitable leader for a wild expedition into the unknown in 1869. The crew lost a boat over a falls, momentarily lost Powell over a cliff face and, on several occasions, nearly lost lives to sudden rapids. The food ran out, but as long as there was coffee, they were OK. Three members of the group split off to hike back to civilization, but they never made it. Local Indians, thinking they were sheep rustlers, didn't wait to ask questions. Two days afterward, the rest of the expedition found a way out of the Grand Canyon and

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***Science and democracy went hand in hand in Powell's vision of the future. Only half of that future came true. The nation did eventually absorb Powell's view about Western aridity. Government responded with massive dam projects.***

floated to safety.

Powell was the last of the great American adventurers in the spirit of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.

He told the story of his trip in a surprisingly poetic book titled *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, written at the behest of his friends in Congress. He would not have liked being called poetic, being a scientist. And much of the book is devoted to geology and to ethnographic observation of American Indians. But there is just enough swashbuckling adventure, no matter how dryly told, to accuse Powell of romantic tendencies. The book is a classic.

The Colorado adventure became his springboard. Dissatisfied with the scientific results of the 1869 mission, he took another crew in 1871. The resulting maps were accurate enough to stand until satellite mapping replaced them. Powell spent much of his time gathering firsthand information from local Indian bands, developing a scientific approach to the study of culture. His data would provide the foundation for American ethnological studies. The expeditions may have been spirited adventure, but they were scientific to the core.

Powell used the reputation derived from his expeditions to pry money out of friends in Washington, including Illinois Sen. John A. Logan of bloody shirt fame. Powell moved to Washington to become director of the Bureau of Ethnology, studying Native

American cultures, and the second director of the United States Geological Survey, which he helped to establish. It was in these two capacities that Powell made his crucial contributions to America's understanding of its own environment.

As Powell did his exploring, America's population was preparing to move out from the prairies onto the last of the country's unclaimed regions, the Great Plains. The pioneers carried with them the same cultural assumptions that had guided the establishment of the first colonies, the expansion across the Appalachians, the taking of the Great Lakes, the peopling of the Pacific coast. The land did not belong to nomadic Indians, natural resources were there for the taking, and God wanted the lands fenced and tamed. Railroads would only accelerate a familiar process.

Powell understood that these assumptions were built on a false supposition, and he tried his best to say so. He knew, none better, that the plains and the lands drained by the Colorado received only one-fourth the average rain of the East. To settle these lands with the expectation of establishing Eastern-style farms was insane. The land would be ruined, and the settlers too. Nationally managed irrigation systems were the only possible answer. Rather than the willy-nilly rules that had governed Eastern settlement, Powell in his reports to Congress advocated a scientific management plan for the arid West.

The plan, among the first of its kind, was an attempt to establish a relationship between human beings and their environment on a rational footing. Powell wanted survey teams not merely to draw boundary lines, but to evaluate the economic capacity of the land — its potential for crop agriculture, for grazing, for mining, the feasibility of irrigation. Surveyed lands would be zoned according to best use, parceled into appropriately sized commodities and distributed to settlers prepared to pursue such activities.

Here was an attempt to classify and manage the public lands — the nation's most precious commodity — on a scientific basis, acknowledging the role of the environment in shaping people's fortunes. Powell calculated that the waters available could irrigate just 40 million acres in the West, a figure remarkably close to current federal estimates. Congress ignored him, of course, holding the Great Plains open to all comers. A period of unusually heavy annual precipitation raised false hopes. The droughts of the 1890s and the 1930s followed.

Despite occasional rhapsodic descriptions of the Grand Canyon and the West, Powell was no preservationist. He saw the transformation of the Western deserts into a land of fertile and productive farms as an absolute good. He differed from most of his fellow citizens only in method: Scientific management was going to have to replace individual pluck if the enterprise was to succeed. The federal management of the water supply was to be a highly organized means to a democratic end, a West flourishing in small, individually owned farms. Science and democracy went hand in hand in Powell's vision of the future.

Only half that future came true. The nation did eventually absorb Powell's point about Western aridity. Government responded with massive dam projects directed by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers. These busy beavers have now dammed just about every river running in the West. As the author, historian Donald Worster, observed, "The Colorado River is a part of nature that has died and been reborn as money." The desert has indeed blossomed in places — Tucson, Las Vegas, California's Imperial Valley.

In the haze of all this activity (which has drowned much of the canyonland Powell described in his book), only one thing was forgotten: democracy. In the place of the small, independent farms Powell envisioned, we have vast holdings owned and managed by a small, wealthy elite who become richer off the backs of migrant laborers while the rest of us foot the tax bills to maintain the





*Fresh snow along the Sangamon River in Lake of the Woods, Champaign County Forest Preserve*

dams that make them rich. There is nothing more elusive than democracy, especially when it is possible for a small coterie to manage a single, irreplaceable resource. Federally managed Western water has made a few folks rich, and lots of people poor.

John Wesley Powell became the first truly powerful and influential scientific bureaucrat in American history. He remained director of the U.S. Geological Survey until 1894, and retained his position at the Bureau of Ethnology for a few years thereafter, despite nagging pain and new surgeries on the remains of his arm. He did much to educate America about its own treasured landscape, publishing maps and highly polished government reports, and was instrumental in founding the National Geographic Society. America mourned his death in 1902.

I have not the foggiest idea why Illinois does not claim him as a native

son, but the fact is we do not. Despite the universal respect afforded his book on the exploration of the Colorado, his name does not appear on lists of Illinois authors. No cities are named after him, nor streets, nor even buildings, so far as I know. Too much science — too much environmental science — and not enough hardball politics, I suppose. Not being much for monuments myself, I do not really care.

Still, I would rather John Wesley Powell be remembered here in Illinois. As gasoline prices rise, the world's weather warms and the West looks greedily to the water resources of the Great Lakes, there are some lessons from Powell's experience we need to recall.

John Wesley Powell tried hard to establish a rational approach to the politics of scarcity. When an essential resource dwindles — be it water, or petroleum, or arable land — a lot can

happen, most of it bad. Powell's two watchwords were science and democracy; he firmly believed that these two concepts must work in harmony if American liberty was to survive. Powell's vision did not survive the destruction of the Colorado. We got scientific management, but no real democracy. As it becomes necessary to manage more and more of our natural resources, we had best shepherd our human resources and make certain that the greedy few do not steal everything for themselves. Without economic freedom, there is no democracy. John Wesley Powell understood that well enough.

If we have no other means to honor his memory, let us at least try to remember what he said about water and democracy. □

*Robert Kuhn McGregor, an environmental historian at the University of Illinois at Springfield, is a regular contributor to the magazine.*



# THE BUTTERFLIES OF SUMMER

*Much experience of wildlife is chancy and quick.  
Sometimes nature provides only hints and mances*

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by **Ryan Reeves**

Photographs courtesy of the Illinois Natural History Survey

What is it about butterflies? They help spread flowers, certainly. But that may be the least of nature's tricks.

Entomologist John Bouseman believes butterflies also help spread ecological consciousness. This would be a scientist's way of saying that, on seemingly fragile wings, butterflies carry a wider appreciation of wildlife to generations of Americans.

What kid hasn't spent a summer's day stalking butterflies? What adult can't recall the experience?

Bouseman and James Sternburg, a fellow entomologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey in Champaign, aim to promote this sort of pollination. They've compiled a field guide so every Illinoisan, kid or adult, can identify and appreciate each of the more than 90 kinds of butterflies found in the state. Sternburg, an emeritus entomology professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, took most of the photographs.

Their guide provides descriptive details on each butterfly, as well as its natural history. But these scientists also consider the environment. Most butterfly conservation efforts are directed toward critical habitats, Bouseman says. The preservation and restoration of dry and wet prairies are

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**FIELD GUIDE TO BUTTERFLIES IN ILLINOIS**  
*John K. Bouseman and James G. Sternburg, 2001*  
*Illinois Natural History Survey*

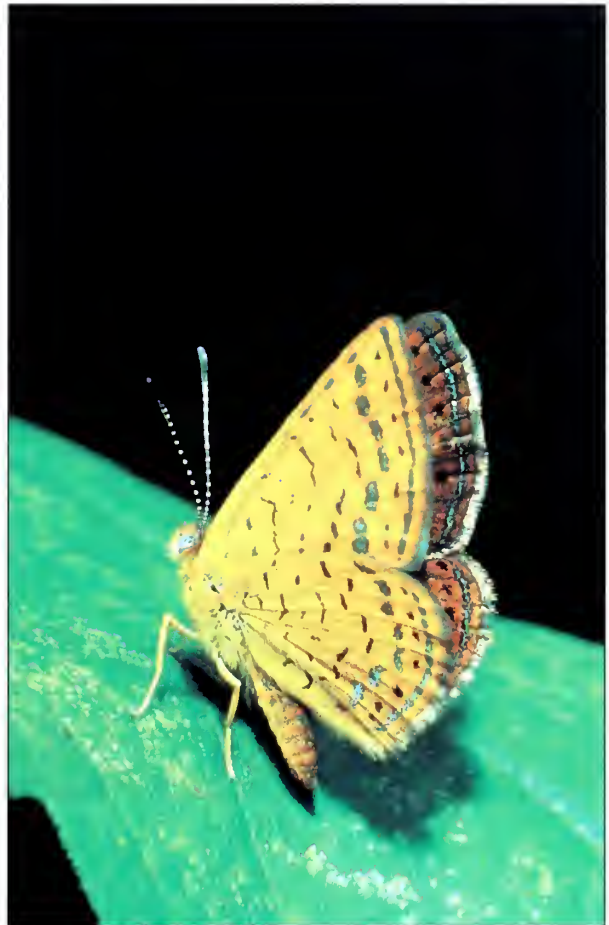




*Giant Swallowtail*



*Coral Hairstreak*



*Swamp Metalmark*



*Eastern Tailed-blue*



*Zebra Swallowtail*

integral to maintaining most butterfly populations.

Bouseman contends butterflies epitomize what's good about nature. And why shouldn't we be interested in this most charismatic of insects, particularly those in the locale we inhabit?

Conservationist and poet Gary Snyder argues that our relation to the natural world is rooted in place and that knowledge and experience increase that connection. He adds that our experience of much of wildlife is chancy and quick. So we need to be tuned to the hints and nuances nature provides.

Nuance butterflies certainly have.

In 1848, Rebecca Burland described Illinois butterflies as possessing "such a beautifully variegated combination that any imitation would be utterly impractical."

These days, admiration motivates communities throughout the state to hold events focused on the insect. Dean Johnson of the Peoria Nature Park, for instance, has organized a Butterfly Day each August for the past three years. Public interest hasn't waned. Folks come to learn how to raise butterflies, how to protect them, how to create backyard habitats that will nurture them. Butterflies seemed a natural for a park event, says Johnson. "Whenever someone thinks of summer, they think of butterflies."

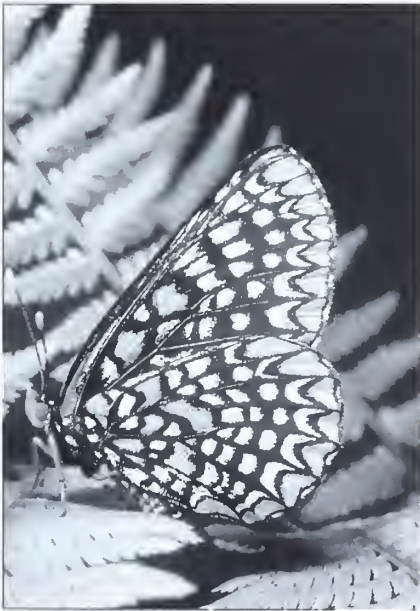
As for this summer, Bouseman is upbeat. "Red Admiral populations are large, Summer Azures are around in numbers and the Monarchs are back. It's a good butterfly year."

And these are just a sample of what Illinoisans might glimpse if they tune in, as Snyder suggests, to nature's hints and nuances. □





*Spicebush Swallowtails*



*Baltimore*



*Black Swallowtail*

## PEOPLE

Edited by Rodd Whelpley

### Commerce commission gets a new director

Scott Wiseman of Chatham assumed leadership of the Illinois Commerce Commission on July 1. He moved to the commission from the Illinois Department of Revenue, where he had been chief of staff since 1999.

Wiseman also served as executive assistant to George Ryan when Ryan was secretary of state. Wiseman became deputy director in the secretary of state's office in 1995.

At the commission, he succeeds outgoing Executive Director **Charles Fisher**, who took the position in 1995.

If the governor signs changes approved by lawmakers, the commission will oversee telecommunications reforms, including establishing flat-rate local phone packages and credits to consumers when a company misses appointments (see *Illinois Issues*, June, page 10).

### Springfield teen's duck design is a winner

Sean Langa, a 17-year-old Springfield High School student, won best of show honors in the state level 2001 Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest.

The annual contest is offered through the Federal Junior Duck Stamp and Conservation Program, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The service sells the winning image nationally to stamp collectors and conservationists.

Langa produced his drawing of a Wood duck under the direction of Springfield High School teacher Cindy Huffman-Hocking.

## ○ BIT

### Gary Maher

Though he had moved to a new stage in his career, the echo of this powerful utility lobbyist's refrain continued to reverberate this spring as the General Assembly composed its grand-scale rewrite of state telecommunications law.

Gary J. Maher, who died June 10 at the age of 45, made the legislature hear his voice above the massive chorus of telecommunications lobbyists during his 15 years as president of the Cable Television and Communications Association of Illinois. He had left the cable association, which he founded, in January to become a vice president at Guinness UDV North America.

## More than just a reference book

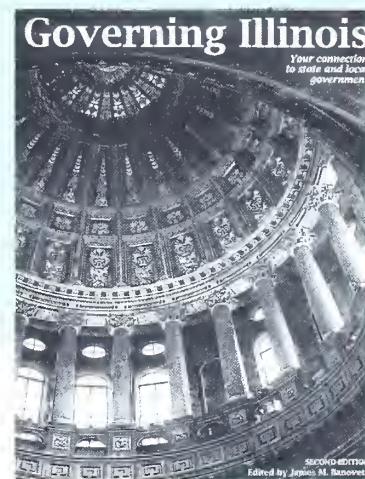
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## Shake-up in Chicago schools

For the first time since 1995, when the legislature handed Mayor **Richard M. Daley** authority over an ailing Chicago public school system, there has been a shift in leadership.

Taking over as the new board of education president is AT&T executive and former Chicago Park District president **Michael Scott**. Gone are lawyer **Gery Chico**, who resigned as school board president, and **Paul Vallas**, who stepped down as public schools CEO.

In selecting Scott, Mayor Daley continues his approach of choosing professional managers rather than career educators for top spots in the city's school administration.

Daley appointed Chico and Vallas to the top positions in July 1995 and charged them with reforming the system. During their tenure, the school system abolished "social promotion" for failing students, balanced its budget and beefed up after-school and summer-school programs (see *Illinois Issues*, March 1998, page 15, and March 1999, page 32).

Overall, students posted higher test scores, but the latest round of results showed improvement has gone flat.

## Higher Ed board leader to step down

**Keith Sanders**, executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, will leave the post next June. He has been the director since January 1998.

Sanders, who hails from Benton, was a dean and professor at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale for 22 years and a vice president in the University of Wisconsin System before joining the board.

During Sanders' watch, the board initiated such high-tech advancements as the Illinois Century Network, a high-speed broadband link-up of colleges to public and private schools, libraries and museums; the Illinois Virtual Campus, an electronic catalogue of online courses offered by Illinois colleges and universities; and the Illinois Virtual High School, which offers high school students specialized and advanced placement coursework.

The board will hire a search firm to help find Sanders' successor. They hope to hire someone next spring.

**Ross Hodel**, a deputy director, also has retired. He will be hired on a contractual basis to lobby for the board when the legislature is back in session.

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## Smart energy policies can slow global warming

Robert Kuhn McGregor's article on global warming (see *Illinois Issues*, April, page 32) starts off with a bang, but ends with a whimper. He begins by discussing the differences between weather and climate and then reviews the harrowing future that the Midwest faces if global warming continues — less fresh water and more soil aridity, pollution, hurricanes and tornadoes. He recognizes all credible evidence points to coal plants, trucks and cars, and oil refineries as the principal cause of global warming.

But then he says we just can't solve this environmental problem that is the most fundamental challenge for our generation. If that kind of thinking had prevailed 30 years ago, Lake Michigan would still be polluted with phosphate detergents and raw industrial wastes, the Cuyahoga River would still be burning and our air and water would be just as dirty as they were in the early 1970s.

McGregor disparages international agreements in general and the Kyoto Protocol in particular. Although the Kyoto Protocol's carbon dioxide pollution reduction actions are not a complete cure-all for global warming, they are an important first step. The United States would be required to cut emissions by 7 percent from 1990 levels over the next decade. Other industrialized nations would have similar targets. That would mean a better and safer climate future for the Midwest and the world.

McGregor also overlooks the fact that the United States now produces over half of the Western world's carbon dioxide pollution. By the end of this decade, the United States will likely be pumping out 30 percent more greenhouse gases than in 1990 unless we change public policies. If the United States were to adopt smart and sustainable energy policies that



emphasize modern clean energy efficiency, new renewable energy technologies and clean fuels, we could prevent the kind of climate changes that McGregor laments as inevitable.

We cannot completely manage nature, but we can certainly take sensible, practical steps to prevent catastrophic global warming. Let's take on this challenge of our times and forge smart solutions to this environmental problem.

**Howard A. Learner**  
Executive Director  
Environmental Law and Policy  
Center  
Chicago

## Voting anomalies prior to Cutback Amendment

"Could the south rise again?" (see *Illinois Issues*, May, page 30) was a thought-provoking article. The authors hint at the debacle that occurred as a result of the so-called Legislative Cutback Amendment in 1980. They are incorrect, however, in saying there previously was a guaranteed election of "no more than two from any party."

The voter had an option of one, one and a half, two or three votes for General Assembly candidates. History records some city of Chicago districts with three from one party (Democrats mainly) in one House district. The two parties were not barred from nominating as many as three candidates for the November elections. Three representatives from one party was an anomaly. But in retrospect, the system prior to the cutback probably was more appropriate insofar as providing more balance in minority representation.

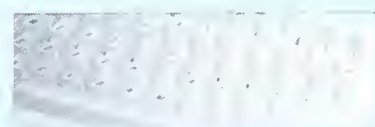
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Patrick E. Gauen



## To Missourians, it looks good for the home team to stay home

by Patrick E. Gauen

**I**magine moving the Chicago Cubs to Gary or the Bears to Hammond. Can you? In your wildest thoughts? Well, the New York Jets play in New Jersey, don't they?

Keep that in mind as I introduce you to a simmering subject of discussion in Metro East. It would already be boiling, but even before a tentative deal to keep the team in St. Louis was announced in mid-June, many people rejected out-of-hand any suggestion the St. Louis Cardinals would shift their home a couple thousand yards eastward, across the Mississippi. We are, after all, talking about the most revered professional sports franchise in the proud state of Missouri.

The key word is proud. I didn't say possessive. Not possessive enough, anyway, to suit the owners of the Cardinals, who would have liked Missouri to feel about \$250 million's worth of possessive. That had been the proposed taxpayer share of the \$370 million cost of replacing Busch Stadium. But the Missouri legislature balked, prompting the new compromise plan supported by the mayor and the governor.

Stan Musial was still in his prime at 35, but the stadium behind his statue has been targeted for euthanasia at the same age. "Knock it down and they will come — and spend" is the mantra of team owners who appreciate their three million fans a year but expect even

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*Being the Cardinals' rebound lover might work out, but only so long as Illinois isn't being (or hasn't already been) played for a fool.*

better financial results with the amenities of a classic-looking, new brick ball yard.

Now, Illinoisans certainly understand regional rivalries in politics. Missouri is really divided among St. Louis, Kansas City and everywhere else. Even if St. Louis politicians are solidly behind a stadium deal, the other Missouris still may be leery — or at least eager for similar servings of pork.

Earlier this spring, proponents yelled as loudly as they could that the whole proposed taxpayer liability might be covered by new revenue from that new stadium. But the message fell on the sore ears of some people who couldn't shake the feeling they got taken with public financing of the new downtown dome for the St. Louis Rams. So, prior to the announcement, there had been overtures, I guess you'd call them, between some Illinois pols and Cardinals President Mark Lamping about an alternate site.

State Rep. Kurt Granberg, a Carlyle Democrat, has been the leader of a

cautious approach to this. He rightfully treads with ease.

If the tentative deal falls through, being the Cardinals' rebound lover might work out, but only so long as Illinois isn't being (or hasn't already been) played for a fool.

Illinois Senate President James "Pate" Philip, a Wood Dale Republican, and a few others have more or less suggested that anybody who believes the Cardinals might move here needs a lobotomy. But I remember a few years back when naysayers moaned that only the insane would put a casino in high-crime East St. Louis. The crazy people who put one there anyway got rich for it.

You should remember, too, that today's Cardinals are in the hands of an ownership group, no longer the Busch beer bulwarks of St. Louis. Business considerations may guide their actions.

Stung by separate rebuffs from St. Louis City Hall and the Missouri Capitol over the scale of proposed taxpayer involvement, Lamping et al. quietly regrouped. Granberg, meanwhile, was getting some bipartisan team support (from Illinois Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, and Republican Gov. George Ryan, to name two). He waits in the Springfield bullpen with some kind of state-backed bond financing plan to play if the Cardinals flash the signal.

A few Missouri suburbs are looking for such a signal as well, but would have to deal with the same reluctance in Jefferson City. So if the St. Louis proposal cannot pull out of its slump, Illinois may be the best reliever.

It is an audacious idea, to be sure, but it's risk-free at this point to offer up East St. Louis with its abundant vacant land in the afternoon shadow of the Gateway Arch.

Before the All-Star break, it looks good for the home team to stay home. But, if they strike out, Illinois will have a better idea what it would cost to take the field. Literally. □

*Patrick E. Gauen writes an Illinois column for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.*

Charles N. Wheeler III



## Partisanship thwarted any hopes of election reforms in Illinois

by Charles N. Wheeler III

**B**efore last November, most Americans saw voting as a fairly straightforward, uncomplicated act of civic duty. Folks went to the polls and punched their ballots, then tuned in to the evening news or read the morning paper to find out who won, all without giving much thought to what happened in between.

Such blissful ignorance ended in the days following the November 7 election, as ongoing uncertainty about the outcome of the Florida presidential vote thrust the nuts and bolts of election mechanics into the public spotlight, revealing to voters just how messy and imprecise the process of counting ballots really is.

That reality is nothing new to election officials, of course. A tally that's a close approximation is usually good enough when the winner's margin of victory is sizable, and in really close races, the loser can ask for a recount and then challenge the official numbers in court or elsewhere, depending on the office.

After such terms as "hanging chads" and "butterfly ballots" became staples for late-night comedians, however, election reform became a favorite cause of political leaders from coast to coast. Florida became the poster child for poorly conducted elections, thanks to the 180,000 or so presidential ballots not counted there, in most cases because the tabulating machines

---

*What reforms might one expect from a state whose citizens seemed to find voting even more confusing than did Floridians, a state with 190,000 uncounted presidential ballots, 10,000 more than in Florida?*

detected no vote for any candidate or found a voter had marked for more than one hopeful.

Eager to mend the state's laughing-stock image, Florida lawmakers this spring passed and Gov. Jeb Bush signed into law sweeping election reforms. Key features include a mandate for uniform statewide ballots in general elections; a ban on punch cards, lever machines and paper ballots; a requirement for machines that let voters know if they've marked for too many candidates and \$32 million to pay for the new machines; and voter education.

The new law "will serve as a model for the rest of the nation," the governor said, and give Florida voters a system "that will be the envy of the country."

Florida's response might seem a no-brainer, of course, after the state was made the butt of so many jokes. If that's so, what reforms might one expect from a state whose citizens seemed to find voting even more confusing than did Floridians, a state with 190,000 uncounted presidential ballots, 10,000 more than in Florida?

If you said none, congratulations, for that's exactly what happened in Illinois, the state with the nation's sorriest track record in last fall's election. Granted, there was not the same element of drama here as in Florida; even had all of the uncounted ballots gone to President George W. Bush, he still would have lost Illinois by almost 400,000 votes. Still, not all elections are landslides; at the local level in particular, a few dangling chads could have enormous impact.

By the time Illinois lawmakers ended the spring session, though, partisanship had thwarted any hopes of election reforms to forestall a Florida-like debacle here.

Perhaps the most ambitious plan came from House Republicans, who proposed the statewide use of optical scanning, a system in which voters make their choices by coloring in ovals on the ballot, just as schoolchildren do on standardized tests. The voter then inserts the ballot into a device that records the vote or catches any errors, giving the person a chance to correct them. The GOP proposal included \$57.5 million to help local officials purchase the new equipment.

That plan drew fire from Democrats, however, who argued that local election officials should be free to choose the technology they deem best.

While the Republican proposal never came to a vote, a rival Democratic measure sailed through the House 113-0, only to be entombed in the Senate Rules Committee. The



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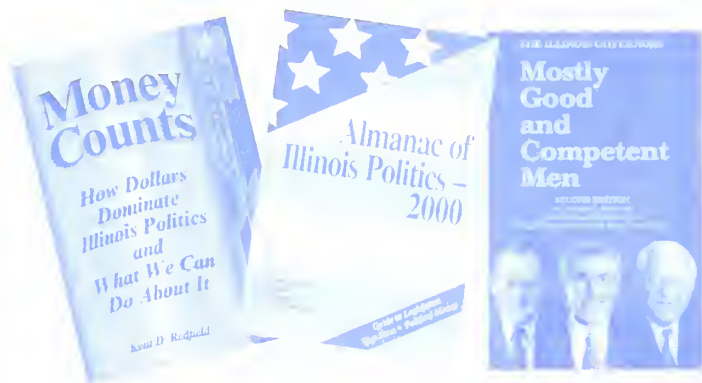
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legislation would allow election officials to use in-precinct counting machines programmed to let voters know if they failed to vote for an office or voted for too many candidates. The measure also provided for the state to pick up the tab for the new devices.

Senate Republicans, though, saw the ballot checking as an affront to voting secrecy. They argued voters often choose not to mark for anyone in a particular race, a decision that election officials should not question. To underscore the point, the Senate voted 36-16, mostly along party lines, to forbid election officials from using voting machines that would detect when a voter passes over an office. When the measure reached the House, however, Democrats deleted the ban in committee, and the revised bill never was called for a vote on the floor.

Meanwhile, lawmakers paid scant heed to a recommendation by the State Board of Elections to let local officials also use touch screen voting machines, similar to ATMs, if they wish. The touch screens are more costly than

***Lawmakers paid scant heed to a recommendation by the State Board of Elections to let local officials also use touch screen voting machines, similar to ATMs, if they wish.***

optical scanners, but are the top choice of election supervisors to replace punch cards in some of Florida's largest counties.

Given the legislative inertia, voters in most Illinois precincts can expect still to be using punch cards for the primary election nine months from now, with the familiar problems of

hanging and pregnant chads, ballot cards not aligned properly for punches to register correctly, and no helpful in-precinct machine to alert them of possible ballot defects.

Fewer such problems are likely in the 10 percent or so of precincts using optical scanners, a disparity that raises an intriguing possibility: Might not a federal court conclude someday that voters in counties using punch cards are more likely to have their ballots thrown out than voters in counties using optical scanners, a circumstance that violates the equal protection clause of the Constitution?

Such a finding, following the logic a U.S. Supreme Court majority used in deciding Bush won Florida and thus the White House, would be a sure remedy to the partisan gridlock that has stymied election reform in the Statehouse. □

*Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.*

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